DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 317 549 TM 014 487

TITLE	Statement to the Governors Cautions on Standardized Testing .
INSTITUTION	National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest), Cambridge, MA.
PUB DATE	29 Nov 89
NOTE	6p.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Achievement Tests; Educational Objectives; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Multiple Choice Tests; Public Schools; *Scores; *Standardized Tests; State Programs; *Testing Problems

ABSTRACT

This paper is prompted by the Joint Statement issued from the Education Summit, and addresses the need to change testing policy from reliance on standardized, multiple-choice testing to the use of more authentic methods of assessing educational performance and progress. The governors are warned against increasing the use of standardized tests and the use of test scores as measures of educational progress and against raising scores to the level of an educational goal. In its 1988 report, "Fallout from the Testing Explosion", the National Center for Fair and Open Testing found that the over 100 million standardized tests administered to public school students each year reduce educational quality and equal opportunity by narrowing the curriculum to the limited skills these multiple-choice examinations can measure, encouraging inaccurate placement decisions, and undermining school accountability. It is concluded that standardized, multiple-choice tests subvert educational goals outlined in the Educational Summit. These goals are associated with the readiness of children to start school; the performance of students on international achievement tests; the reduction of dropout rates and improvement of academic performance, especially among at-risk students; the functional literacy of the adult population; the level of training necessary to guarantee a competitive workforce; the supply of qualified teachers and up-to-date technology; and the establishment of safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools. (TJH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.
"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. Monty Neill
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED317549

FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

November 29, 1989

Statement to the Governors

The goals outlined in the Joint Statement issued from the Educational Summit provide a comprehensive base on which to construct an educational reform agenda. It is therefore crucial that the methods chosen to measure progress toward these goals be carefully selected so that they facilitate, not undermine, school improvement and reform. Such measures must be accurate and comprehensive. They must measure what they claim to measure and measure educational performance in all its complexity and richness.

In this light, standardized, multiple-choice tests must not become the central measure of academic attainment. These exams are not comprehensive in what they measure, and they hinder, rather than encourage, the high quality teaching and learning that must be the central element of school reform.

Therefore, the governors should include, as part of their final plans, the goal of moving from reliance on standardized multiple-choice test scores as significant educational indicators to use of authentic methods of assessing educational performance and progress. They should not call for increasing the use of standardized tests, for using test scores as measures of educational progress, or for raising scores to be an educational goal.

In its 1988 report, Fallout from the Testing Explosion, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest), found that the over 100 million standardized tests administered to public school students each year reduce educational quality and equal opportunity by narrowing the curriculum to the limited skills these multiple-choice exams can measure, encouraging inaccurate placement decisions, and undermining school accountability.

TM014487

342 Broadway, Cambridge, Mass. 02139 (617) 864-4810

A growing number of education organizations have recognized the limits and dangers of standardized testing. For example, the National Council of Teachers of English recently passed a resolution urging "state departments of education and local school districts to end immediately the use of norm-referenced, multiple-choice, standardized tests for children in preschool and the primary grades." The Council for Basic Education has called for "A national moratorium on multiple-choice testing, because of its deadening effect on teaching and curriculum."

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has concluded, "Rather than producing excellence, the overuse (and misuse) of standardized testing has led to the adoption of inappropriate teaching practices as well as admission and retention policies that are not in the best interests of individual children or the nation as a whole."

And Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, has stated, "I would call for an immediate end to standardized tests as they are now." He has explained that higher test scores "are not necessarily a sign that schools are improving, that students know more reading and math... Kids may actually be learning less because other, more important things that won't be tested are being neglected."

Experience with the testing explosion over the past decade has shown that standardized testing hinders real education. If the subject material is narrow and the teaching methods based on multiple-choice tests, then our children will become good at taking tests, but not good at reading, writing, mathematics, science, history, thinking or creating.

Here is how an increase in standardized multiple-choice testing can subvert the educational goals articulated by the Governors and the Administration:

1. The readiness of children to start school. While children need healthy physical, emotional, social and intellectual development that can prepare them for school, it is also true that schools for young children must be ready for five and six year-olds. Overwhelming evidence indicates that a narrow, pencil-and-paper-based schooling for young children is developmentally inappropriate and educationally counter-productive. Young children need a wide-ranging, healthy and happy school experience that includes not only proper use of academics, but also attention to the moral, social and emotional development of children. An emphasis on testing will preclude appropriate educational experiences for young children.

.- The performance of students on international achievement tests, especially in math and science. As a broad indicator, international achievement tests, like their domestic counterparts, can roughly indicate some limited areas of knowledge and achievement. But as multiple choice instruments, they cannot tell us what we most need to know: whether our students can think in and use math and science or other disciplines. If they come to drive the curriculum, they will have the same effects as domestic tests in hindering real educational reform.

3. The reduction of the dropout rate and the improvement of academic performance, especially among at-risk students. Education needs to engage the students in challenging and meaningful experiences that lead students to participate, think, work and learn. If the educational experience is alienating, meaningless, boring and frustrating, students will leave school. Schooling based on multiple choice tests is the sort of schooling that drives many students out of school. Moreover, retention in grade, often caused by failing multiple-choice tests, produces over-age students and an increase in the dropout rate.

4. The functional literacy of adult Americans. Literacy is rooted in the need to communicate. Learning to read and write, at any age, must be based on the desire and effort to learn to communicate. Standardized testing, and teaching to the test, is not about communication, but about reproducing passive responses on a subject of no real interest or meaning. The standardized testing experience has been shown to drive adult learners out of literacy centers and thereby reduce the likelihood that they will learn to read and write.

5. The level of training necessary to guarantee a competitive workforce. Our nation needs a workforce that can think, act independently yet cooperatively, and be creative. Not only do standardized tests not measure these things, to the extent they control education they ensure that these goals will not be met. Standardized tests crowd out time for real learning.

6. The supply of qualified teachers and up-to-date technology. Teachers who are only technicians trained to help students practice test-taking skills will not be qualified to encourage the development of the higher order skills our students and nation needs. Those people who might be our best teachers, the ones who inspire, will be driven away from an occupation whose goal is reduced to test coaching.

7. The establishment of safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools. Safe, well-ordered, drug-free schools will be the product of an education system that welcomes all students and provides them with a caring, stimulating, challenging and meaningful experience. Our children deserve to have their school experiences be so rewarding that they want to go to school and participate in learning, rather than fighting or taking drugs. A test-driven education with dumbed-down curriculum and heavy use of tracking produces the wrong kind of atmosphere.

We do not mean to say that standardized testing is the root cause of all educational problems. However, tests are a partial cause of problems and, more importantly, they are a major obstacle to needed educational reform. If standardized, multiple-choice tests become the major basis for assessing educational progress, they will come to dominate schooling and, in so doing, will undermine all the important goals in which the Joint Statement has suggested.

Fortunately, alternative, appropriate and authentic methods of assessing our students already exist in many areas and are rapidly being designed in other areas. Many states are beginning to use them.

North Carolina, Mississippi and Georgia have stopped mandating some tests and are replacing them with developmentally appropriate assessments. California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine and Michigan are among those states that are including alternatives as part of their statewide testing programs. Some are already involved in a process of phasing out multiple-choice standardized tests and using authentic assessments. Other states, including Arizona, New York and Vermont, are experimenting or considering alternatives.

The governors need to set clear educational goals. They must insist that the means of measuring the goals do not subvert them. Therefore, they should include, as part of their final plans, the goal of moving from reliance on standardized multiple-choice test scores as significant educational indicators to use of authentic methods of assessing educational performance and progress. They should not call for increasing the use of standardized tests, for using test scores as measures of educational progress, or for raising scores to be an educational goal.